

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year B  
September 20, 2009  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Isaiah 35:4-7  
Pastor Paul Horn

### **It's Time for Change**

<sup>4</sup> *say to those with fearful hearts,  
“Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come,  
he will come with vengeance;  
with divine retribution  
he will come to save you.”*

<sup>5</sup> *Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then will the lame leap like a deer,  
and the mute tongue shout for joy.  
Water will gush forth in the wilderness  
and streams in the desert.*

<sup>7</sup> *The burning sand will become a pool,  
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.*

“It’s time for change, change we can believe in.” The President won the Oval Office using this slogan as his campaign in 2008. *Change* was a word many Americans wanted to hear and the majority voted Obama into office. You’ve heard in the newspapers that change is coming to Fort Knox. I recently attended a clergy brunch at the Leaders’ Club. The Garrison Commander briefed us and said, “We no longer say that change is coming to Fort Knox, it’s here!” Change... words that the councilmen and women of Radcliff love to hear, business owners and banks love to hear those words. These are words we like to hear. Change means more permanency for our community and, God-willing, for our congregation.

It’s time for a change... the prophet Isaiah uses pictures of change from our lesson this morning in chapter 35. He tells the fearful, **“Do not be afraid, be strong. The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer, the mute tongue will shout for joy. Water will bubble up in the middle of a hot, dry desert.”** (vs4-7) What kind of change was the prophet Isaiah predicting?

Let’s set the background: the LORD called Isaiah to be his spokesman 150 years before the nation of Babylon came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and leveled Solomon’s temple to the ground. The Babylonians took most of the population into captivity where they sat in Babylon for 70 years. The LORD through his prophet Isaiah wanted his people to know that change would come. **“God will come with vengeance. He will come and save you.”** (vs4) And, true to his Word, the mighty arm of the LORD rose up and destroyed the enemies who had humiliated his nation. God sent Cyrus, king of Persia, to conquer Babylon. The LORD moved King Cyrus to be favorable toward the

Jews. The king issued a decree allowing the Jewish people to return to their home and rebuild their city and their temple.

Not only did LORD's prophet predict that physical change would come to God's people, he was peering 700 years into future, to a time when true change would come to God's people and to all people of all nations. **"God will come to save you."** (vs4) God promised to send a Savior. These pictures of change prophesied the wonderful deeds the Savior would perform. When God's people saw these signs they would know that God had kept his promise. The Messiah is here! He has come to save his people!

We see the characteristics of the Messiah very clearly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As New Testament believers we are privileged to look back and see the fulfillment of these prophecies, as we did in our Gospel lesson this morning in Mark 7: Jesus healed a man who was mute and deaf. John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come?" Jesus sent the disciples back to John and told them, "Report back to John what you see and hear; the blind see, the mute speak, the deaf hear, those with diseases are healed and the gospel is proclaimed!" (Luke 7:18-28) The Messiah brought power and healing.

But this did not mean that disease and handicaps would all disappear when Messiah came. That would be nice, for those of you who visit chiropractor, physical therapist or pharmacist on regular basis would agree, "Jesus should get rid of these annoyances once and for all!" This doctor brought what they needed most, spiritual healing, spiritual change.

Jesus, the Messiah, the chosen one, anointed by God the Father, came to heal souls, to give sight to the spiritually blind, those who could not see clearly, who were walking around in spiritual darkness; to open up the ears stopped up with unbelief, who didn't want to hear the good news message; to heal legs that couldn't move in the direction God wanted them to go, who were crippled by the self-righteous teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus made them see, and hear, walk through the Words he preached and taught. "The only way to heaven is through belief in me. Not by your works or efforts." Jesus brought a change in their lives, from spiritual deadness to spiritual life, from unbelief to faith and full trust in Jesus as Savior, from darkness to light, from hell bent to heaven bound – a picture of physical changes to portray spiritual changes.

Perhaps Isaiah's favorite theme was to use the picture of a desert to describe this spiritual change. It makes sense. How did Death Valley, California get its name? The constant extreme heat, 120 degrees F during most days; the annual average rainfall of less than 2 inches. No life, just death. Those soldiers who have been to Iraq and Afghanistan will agree. Imagine that life in Kentucky were that way, no rain and a hot sun constantly beating down. And how refreshing the rains from last night and this morning would feel!

This is a beautiful picture of your Christian conversion. Born into this world blind to God, deaf to his message of salvation, not able to walk the way he wants you to, dead...like a desert. Then the water of life was poured on your head, water connected

with Christ' command, and faith and life bubbled up where there was death. Paul in Romans 6:1-4 tells us that this washing with water buried us with Christ and his death. Baptism buried our sin and raised us to a new life, just as Christ was raised from the dead. You have been brought from death to life. Through baptism a new life has sprung up in you, like bubbling water in the middle of Death Valley. Now you can see Savior clearly. You are able to hear his Words and believe them. You have been given strength and the desire to walk in his ways, a big change in your lives.

This big change at your baptism still affects you today. It changes how you live! The LORD tells you in vs4 to be strong and do not fear. Your new life says, "Yes, I will do that! I have nothing to fear, my sins are washed away. My sinful nature has died. Jesus has destroyed death and hell. Heaven is mine. I will not fear the grave. What can this world or Satan or sinful man do to me?"

But when I read vs4 last Monday in preparation for the sermon I asked the question, "Who are those who have fearful hearts? When I looked deep inside, I had to admit, "That's me at times. And that's you." You who are afraid of past sins that continue to haunt you. You who are fearful because life keeps punching you in the face. It's just one thing after another and it gets you down. You're fearful of the future, always thinking, "What's next?" You, the war veteran, who saw buddies blown up by IEDs, who suffered injury yourself. You for whom the terrors of war still come to haunt you in your dreams. Crowds still make you nervous. You still look for cover when a lawnmower backfires. You who have had medical tests that revealed something new in your body and the doctor isn't sure what it is and you have to have more tests. You're afraid. You wonder about your family. How are they going to deal with this? How am I going to deal with this? Teenagers...you are afraid, because you are pressured by friends/girl/boy friend to do things that go against what God commands, and you're afraid because you wonder how you will deal with this peer pressure? And that's why parents fear for the future of their children. Members of this church wonder about the future of our congregation, "Can we make it financially?" But some of you are worried about your own financial future, "How am I going to get out of this mess I've gotten myself into?" You and I are those with fearful hearts.

Our sins burden us like the hot sun burning down with no shade to give relief. You feel as if you are trudging through life like hiking through desert with no water. Life's worries and anxieties have gotten the best of you. And yet...the LORD tells you, "Do not fear! Be strong!" How can our God be so confident about how we will live our lives when we're so uncertain? Because he knows that we are baptized children of God, who have been given new life, that's how God's people live!

Then Christ comes with the water of life, his words of promise, words of strength and comfort, that brings about true change in your life. He speaks words that we need to hear, words that do not change; something that doesn't change for a change, how refreshing! He says, "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28) I hear his words and have to confess, "Yes, Lord Jesus, I repent, for I have not come to you when anxious or afraid or weak. I have sinned.

Forgive me and strengthen me.” And he says, “Come, I will give you rest.” And so we come to the Lord’s Table, and hear his Words of life, “Eat and drink my body and blood together with this bread and wine, poured out as an offering for the forgiveness of your sins. Your sins of faithless worry are forgiven.” Jesus comes to us through his word and reassures us, **“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”** (Psalm 103:8-10).

Then he comes with his final promise, **“God will come to save you.”** (vs4) He has come. He has saved you. He will come again and bring everlasting change for you. “All will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye. He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body, created anew in the image of our Creator, holy and perfect, without sin, incorruptible.” (1Cor 15:51ff, Phil 3:21) That’s why we say with confidence, **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, they will rest from their labors.”** (Rev 14:13) True change will come for us who have been baptized and believe in Jesus. No more will the sun beat down on our heads. No more will tears of sorrow stream down our faces, but tears of joy.

It’s time for a change, a change in our attitude. No more will we despair and say, “Woe is me! Look at my depressing life!” Instead, we will say, “I will be strong for Christ makes me strong. I will not fear, for with Christ Jesus I have nothing to fear! I look to Christ. He has come. He will come again for me. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Save us and rescue us! Amen!”